

Unemployed Workers Union Client Stories

Story 1, Joyce Horn

My name is Joyce Horn. I had worked for Quality Automotive Warehouse, later known as Parts Authority, since 1981. On April 30, 2020, I was working at home because of COVID, and I was laid off. The company said I was laid off because of pandemic cutbacks. I immediately contacted the Department of Labor (DOL). A representative informed me I was eligible for federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). My first weekly certification was for the week of April 26, 2020.

The BEACON system showed me as a regular state unemployment beneficiary even though the payments were PUA. My PUA payments stopped in June of 2021. Like many people, I had to reapply. I was then charged with an overpayment but that was eventually solved. I received multiple mail notices that I did not owe any overpayment money. However, my BEACON account is still showing that I owe an overpayment of \$4650. I was supposed to wait for an adjudicator, but an adjudicator was never assigned. I eventually received PUA payments for June, July, and August. However, it was not the full amount I was owed. DOL took out approximately \$300 from several of my weekly certifications because of the alleged overpayments. The total deducted \$3060.

I believe I should be paid the entirety of my PUA benefits, and any overpayment should be wiped out. The money that DOL deducted was done so erroneously because of an incorrectly alleged overpayment. I have no current obligations to the DOL. I just need the rest of my PUA benefit.

Story 2, Chanase Matthews

My name is Chanase Matthews. I was working for M&T bank in February 2021. I worked at M&T bank for two years, partially in Washington D.C and partially in Virginia. I began working at home because of the pandemic. I was terminated from my telework position out of nowhere. I also worked at Pier 1 imports in Maryland. I stopped working at Pier 1 in December of 2020. I filed for unemployment as soon as I was terminated. April rolled around and I was still not receiving benefits even though I was filing my weekly certifications. I was then told that I needed to wait for adjudication.

DOL further informed me that I needed to file in Virginia. DOL then charged me with an overpayment for a previous position. I set up an overpayment plan so I could start receiving unemployment benefits. In spring of 2021, my landlord filed an eviction notice. Further, the school year for my special needs son was ending. In July, I was evicted right before my son's birthday.

I was homeless and I had still not received any money unemployment. At this time, I also added a claim for federal PEUC benefits on top of my regular state UI. DOL told me I was eligible for PEUC, but I could not file for both at the same time. That was and is not my understanding. My son had to go live with my mother at this time. DOL told me I needed to file a combined wage claim for Virginia, Washington D.C., and Maryland. DOL explained that Virginia and D.C. would need to close their claims simultaneously and send the wage information to Maryland so I can receive all the money I am owed. I did everything DOL asked. I have spoken with multiple different DOL representatives about multiple issues. I finally got a job in August of 2021. DOL then sent me a notice alleging that I fraudulently received money. I stopped filing weekly certifications because I got a job.

I was able to finally get another apartment. However, I still had not received the money I was owed for February through July. Unfortunately, I was terminated from my new job in December of 2021. I am now being told that I am monetarily ineligible to file for unemployment until four flags get resolved. I still file weekly claims and fulfill the job. I have never gone in front of an adjudicator. I need this money to pay my creditors, my bills, and to take care of my son.

Story 3, Neeraj Bajaj

I first filed in November 2019 because my contract with Marriott Hotels came to an end. I received regular state unemployment insurance until it ran out in March 2020. In November 2020, DOL sent me an overpayment letter, saying there were three separate overpayments, and that I owed them in total about \$33,000. I was able to contact a DOL representative who was able to correct one of three of the overpayment errors. Later, in email correspondence, DOL representatives let me know that the other two overpayments were incorrect and that they would submit a ticket (Maryland UI Request: 00533700).

To this date the issue has gone unresolved. Because of these unresolved issues, DOL is docking money from my current unemployment benefit payments. The average total of my monthly bills is about \$2000 per month. I'm behind on my mortgage and other bills. It's also hindering me from looking for another job. I was not able to file for taxes this year because I knew I would not be able to pay what I owe. It also influences my ability to take care of my 4-year-old. If I cannot receive unemployment benefits, I cannot afford to fix my car, buy work clothes, or any of the necessary tasks to have a successful job hunt.

Story 4, Heather Hayes

My name is Heather Hayes. I was collecting PUA benefits beginning in May of 2020. On June 6, 2021, I went to file my weekly certification and could not. I was forced to reapply at this time. Within 24 hours, I was informed that my claims were now on hold. I continued to file my weekly certifications through the end of the federal program. However, my claims remained on hold. The DOL requested verification of my previous employment.

I sent this information to the DOL multiple times but to no avail. I had a meeting in November of 2021 with a case manager and was told the issue would be sorted out. On December 1st, I received a correspondence stating that DOL could not verify my previous employment; consequently, I was apparently not owed benefits. I also received an alleged overpayment charge. I applied for the waiver of overpayment. However, my BEACON account still shows an alleged overpayment.

I have hundreds of inquiry numbers and emails from my correspondence with DOL trying to get this corrected. I have three children but never got the dependent allowance on my PUA claims. The total of this would be almost 3,000 dollars that I never received. I need this money to feed my children. I just want my benefits to be paid correctly.